

Workforce Innovation and Performance Committee of the Monroe County/Rochester Workforce Development Board
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, September 14, 2021
8:00 to 9:00 AM
Meeting Scheduled via ZOOM

Present: Devon Woodward, Patricia Stovall-Lane, Thomas Schulte, Jennifer Geiger, Elizabeth O'Brien, Cherie Becker, Bob Coyne, Jane Sullivan, Romanda Gibson-Stevenson, Debra Bell, Marion French, Randy Andre

Staff and Guest: David Seeley, Lee Koslow, Mary McKeown, Viatta Carter, Antwan Williams

Approval of Minutes:

A motion to approve the June 1, 2021 meeting minutes was made by Bob Coyne and seconded by Thomas Schulte. The motion was carried unanimously.

WIOA Adult/Dislocated Worker Program Performance, July - December 2020:

Lee Koslow began the discussion by reviewing Adult and Dislocated Worker performance, July to December 2020, on the WIOA primary indicators of performance for Monroe County. Performance is summarized in the Workforce Innovation and Performance Committee slideshow.

Discussion: Recommendations to amend training policies to support poverty reduction goals:

WIOA Policy 101 - Priority of Service:

Lee Koslow began this discussion by noting this item is a consideration of some of our policies that impact Individual Training Account (ITA) training with a goal of trying to make our policy line up well with specific local poverty reduction efforts and equity considerations in general. One of the big efforts being taken on locally and being spearheaded by RMAPI, the Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative, is to encourage businesses to raise their minimum wage for their workers to \$15.00 an hour. For quite a number of years, we have had a provision in our Priority of Service Policy impacting ITA training customers. For participants who are over our household income guidelines, we could still serve them with an Individual Training Account if they are employed and earning \$15.00 per hour or less. Now that many businesses are responding to both the pressure to do the right thing, as well as the economic pressure because we are experiencing a very tight labor market, they are raising their minimum wages to \$15.00 per hour or more. To have a policy that says we will only include you in this other group if you are earning \$15.00 per hour or less is going to help fewer and fewer people. The question on this policy is, should we amend this policy to increase the wage for ITA-eligible employed workers to \$18.00 per hour or less? The \$18.00 per hour puts it 20% higher than the \$15.00 per hour wage.

Thoughts shared on this topic include:

- Agree on the wage increase, but should it be tied to the cost of inflation or the rate of inflation, as this wage war could create a wage escalation far beyond what the rate of inflation is.
- What if we were to say we are raising it now to \$18.00 but we would like to index it to a consumer price index or some other measure of inflation and update it every year in September? This is a possibility.
- Due to the labor shortage, many individuals are taking jobs and because of the labor shortage, employers are paying at a higher wage, but that is not necessarily a career that people may foresee or want to get into. Will we see individuals that are currently working at Denny's, for example, paying \$21.00 per hour, but really they have an interest in getting training in advanced manufacturing, will we see some of that discrepancy of pay?

It is possible, so is that a question of is \$18.00 really high enough? Bearing in mind that right now our self-sufficiency wage is \$25.00 an hour and we have been among the highest Workforce Development Areas in the State in terms of the self-sufficiency wage, not that that could not get increased at some point as well, which it might.

- Are we seeing a lot of employers that are going up to the \$15.00 per hour or is it just larger employers? As some smaller businesses are years away from getting people up to \$15.00 per hour, they may plan to, but it is going to be years in the future and not only \$15.00 for entry level, but \$15.00 for some of their experienced workers. The concern here is about raising it up and individuals that are working at smaller companies not being able to utilize the service when they may still be making less than \$15.00, because so many people between the \$15.00 and \$18.00 will now be able to take advantage. There could be the possibility that we are opening it up to so many that we will run out of funds and crowd out the lower wage workers, although it would not happen this year or next, because the demand for the ITA training has significantly decreased, particularly in the last few years.
- The question was raised if we could generate a report of the current wages of the people who come in for ITAs so that we can track that to maybe discern a year or two from now if the utilization is where it is lying within that kind of threshold. Lee responded that we could do this by requesting an ad hoc report that will give us quarterly wages, because it will come from the wage records. We could also do a more time intensive look at the administrative records, which would include a one-by-one lookup. The wage records are quarterly, so they are not necessarily going to be equivalent to an hourly wage. The last time a change was made to the hourly wage, we were at \$12.00 per hour, and we went from \$12.00 to \$15.00, which was more than 20% in terms of an increase. The reason we went to \$15.00 at that point was because of the significance of the whole fight for \$15.00 per hour. There has been a call for \$15.00 for probably a good 10 years or more at this point and it is finally happening right now.
- Randy Andre added that increasing this to \$18.00 or less is probably a smart idea based on the trends of all the agencies we are seeing that are upping the minimum wage to \$15.00 and significantly below this \$18.00, and it is significantly below the living wage which is closer to \$30.00 for here and in many other urban areas. In the past, the training fund has depleted pretty quickly, but it seems like in the past couple of years there has been money to spend, so Randy does advocate for \$18.00. A suggestion was made to perhaps look at tying this to inflation year to year, just to make sure that it saves us from having to go back and do it every 3 years, and it might be a little bit more current. This would be an appropriate metric to use to continue to manage it.

Lee Koslow concluded the discussion indicating this group will make a recommendation to the Full Board and then the Board will vote on this group's recommendation. The Board will usually accept the recommendations that this group makes.

A motion to make a recommendation to increase the employed worker wage in our Priority of Service Policy to \$18.00 an hour tied to the rate of inflation was made by Randy Andre and seconded by Bob Coyne. The motion was carried unanimously.

WIOA Policy 104 – Individual Training Account Guidelines:

Lee Koslow began this discussion noting that related to our Priority of Service, there is a change that we are going to want to discuss to our Individual Training Account Guidelines Policy. In the past, we have only approved Bachelor's degree programs for Dislocated Workers and more recently to Youth ages 18 through 24, but not for WIOA Adults over the age of 24. The reason we did that was because of the high demand for training among Adults. We did not want to have the more skilled Adults who are ready for a Bachelor's degree taking most of the ITAs and crowding out those who were looking for Associate's degrees and certificate programs. With the push for higher wages, one of the inadvertent or undesirable, unanticipated consequences of limiting Bachelor's degrees to only Dislocated Workers is that we are not able to fund them for people who are in the highest levels of poverty and it could end up having a

disparate impact on people with disabilities, people of color and people living in poverty. We don't want to do that, and we would really want for Bachelor's degree programs to be available to everybody regardless of their race, disability status, or income. Lee posed the question, should we amend the policy to also allow the last 2 years toward a Bachelor's degree program for WIOA Adults over the age of 24?

Some group members expressed support for the change because it would allow Adults to take advantage of the second half of a 2 plus 2 program, qualifying them for the financial compensation they need in the career track they are trying to follow. When you look at the future of work, a degree may be very important for people to increase their career advancement.

Lee added that for any training program to be approved, two things need to be in place. First, the school and the training program or degree program would have to be on the New York State Eligible Training Provider List. Second, the occupation that the individual has as their goal has to be a demand occupation, either by being on the list or some other form of proof, like job postings. We wouldn't automatically say no to that Liberal Arts degree, but we generally would not approve it because there isn't a clear connection between that Liberal Arts degree and a specific demand occupation.

A motion to make a recommendation that the policy be amended to also allow the last 2 years toward a Bachelor's degree program for WIOA Adults over the age of 24 was made by Thomas Schulte and seconded by Romanda Gibson-Stevenson. The motion was carried unanimously.

Updates to the Occupations in Demand List - Recommendation to expand from 53 occupations to 63:

Lee Koslow reported that we currently have a demand occupation list with 53 different occupations on it (provided as an attachment). It was last updated two years ago and the reason for that is every two years, New York State Department of Labor's Research and Statistics Division updates the long-term occupational employment projections, which gives the percentage increase or decrease for each occupation, as well as the average annual openings, median wage, and educational level. The general criteria for inclusion on the list are 1) average annual openings of 100 or more; 2) classroom training is available; 3) there is a likelihood of securing training-related employment; and 4) the typical education needed for entry is less than a Master's degree.

Lee shared that we are proposing one deletion from the Occupations in Demand List, Electrical and Electronics Engineering Technicians, and that is because the average annual openings have decreased, and this is the occupation with the lowest number average annual openings on the list. We haven't funded any training grants lately in this occupation. It would be an Associate's degree.

Lee added that we are proposing 12 additions to the Occupations in Demand List, which is probably the most we've had in quite a while. Taking a look at the new projections, this was a group of occupations that look like it would fit and be in line with increased opportunities for Adults over age 24 to use an ITA toward a Bachelor's degree. Most of these proposed additions are Bachelor's degree occupations that have either increased in demand or have simply been overlooked in the past.

The following occupations require a Bachelor's degree:

- Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists
- Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors
- Child, Family, and School Social Workers
- Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education
- Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education
- Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education
- Special Education Teachers, Secondary School

- Graphic Designers
- Public Relations Specialists

Computer Network Support Specialists requires an Associate's degree, which would focus on help desk or field technician work at the network level. Billing and Posting Clerks and Electrical, Electronic, and Electromechanical Assemblers, Except Coil Winders, Tapers, and Finishers requires a High School Diploma or equivalent, plus some type of vocational training.

A motion to carry these recommendations to the Full Board for the 1 deletion and 12 additions to the list was made by Thomas Schulte and seconded by Romanda Gibson-Stevenson. The motion was carried unanimously.

Next Meeting Scheduled: December 7, 2021

Meeting adjourned at 8:56 AM
Submitted by: Mary McKeown

Reviewed by:
Lee Koslow 9/27/2021